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# Influence of Language Games on Functional Literacy of Younger School-Age Children

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## Abstract

*The fundamental goal of Croatian language teaching in primary school is to develop language and communicative competence, i.e. to develop functional literacy (Teaching plan, 2006). Precisely for this reason, Croatian language teaching should encourage the development of literacy in an interesting and creative manner. Creativity is a fundamental human potential that can be enhanced by stimulating creative thinking systematically throughout the educational process and at all ages. If it is to be achieved in a language class, creativity has to be encouraged through a teaching accompanied not only by interesting manner of teaching and teaching sources, but also by an unconventional and original approach that will require the pupil to be open, curious and critical. This is why the aim of this study is to investigate the influence of language games, as a creative form of teaching, on the development of literacy in Croatian language class. Participants in the research were third and fourth grade pupils (N=140), divided into two groups, the control and the experimental group. The experimental group was presented with a class consisting of three language games, the aim of which was to stimulate literacy. The results of both groups were compared, as well as the pupils' attitude towards Croatian language and school in general. The results showed that the participants like Croatian language, but they dislike school in general and that in Croatian language class games are played only sometimes though everybody likes playing because it makes learning more interesting. Girls had a more positive attitude towards Croatian language content than boys, while third grade pupils had a more positive attitude than fourth grade pupils. Pupils in the experimental group showed a more positive attitude towards Croatian language as a school subject as well as better results in the tests of knowledge. The results of the experimental*

*group prove that it is important to use more language games, as a creative tool of teaching literacy, as often as possible in Croatian language class.*

**Key words:** *creative thinking; early learning of Croatian language; functional literacy; language games.*

## Introduction

Croatian language is the most comprehensive subject in the entire primary school education since it includes four educational areas: language (orthography and grammar), literature, media culture and language expression (written and oral). It is represented by the largest number of lessons in primary school (5 lessons per week from the first to the sixth grade and four lessons per week in the seventh and the eighth grade). The basic aim of Croatian language teaching is the acquisition of language competences, which means that the pupil is functionally literate in Croatian language. In early Croatian language teaching, special attention is paid to the development of communicative language competence which assumes the use of language in various communicative situations (Pavličević-Franić, 2005). Moreover, communicative language competence assumes the use of language and its realization through language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, research has shown that in early Croatian language learning pupils have better developed linguistic (language) competence, in other words “the knowledge about language”, than communicative language competence (communicative competence), which refers to the use of language in various communicative situations (Pavličević-Franić & Aladrović, 2008, Aladrović Slovaček, 2012). The mentioned results actually show that at the end of primary school pupils are often “functionally illiterate”. The same problem also occurs at the end of secondary school since pupils taking the national exam in Croatian language have low scores in the part of the exam on grammar and orthography and being aware of their lack of language knowledge they mostly fear the essay in Croatian language. Poor or insufficient knowledge of language is often related to the pupils’ attitudes towards the subject itself and Croatian language in general. Research results (Miljević-Riđički et al., 2000) showed that Croatian language along with Mathematics is on the pupils’ list of least favourite subjects. Similar research (Pavličević-Franić & Aladrović Slovaček, 2011) showed that, compared to ten years ago, the situation has changed and now Croatian language is in the middle of the list of the favourite, but also the least favourite subjects. The assumption is that this improved attitude is partly due to the new Teaching plan (2006), which is less encumbering and takes a more creative and different approach by teachers towards not only the subject, but also the pupils. All of the above-mentioned facts point to the need to further research the problem of functional illiteracy in Croatian language and identify a new and alternative approach which would help solve this problem.

## Teaching Literacy

Within the educational process, literacy is the most important skill enabling the pupils for language communication, learning all other school subjects and inclusion

into the life-long learning process. In 2005, by passing the document “Eight Key Competences for Life-Long Learning”, the European Commission showed the importance of literacy development stating that “communication in the mother tongue” is the first and key competence of life-long learning. Institutional literacy teaching starts when a child enters the first grade of primary school and continues in accordance with the development of cognitive abilities, building on the existing knowledge. Therefore, the contents including the development of literacy are a part of language (orthography and grammar) and a part of language expression. Throughout the curriculum, these contents are vertically extended according to the age of pupils. Most exams prepared for primary and secondary school pupils show that most deviations occur in exercises requiring “functional literacy” (especially in writing “yat“, capital and small letter and similar). One of the ways to bring these contents closer to the pupils is “creative teaching”.

Developing literacy in a creative manner includes various methods and aspects of learning as well as the possibility to learn the language through games, which provides an unburdened path to knowledge. While playing games, children learn without getting tired, they are more concentrated, acquire contents faster, the time passes much quicker for them and they are actually not aware that they are learning (Pavličević-Franić, 2011; Peti-Stantić & Velički, 2009). Game is only one creative way which helps and enables pupils to acquire abstract contents, such as language contents, more easily. Therefore, it is necessary to enrich lessons with various stimulating tasks and problem situations which the pupils would solve through games and at the same time not only learn and discover their rules, but also seek other ways and paths which would enable better acquisition of language contents and functional literacy.

### ***Creative Lessons***

Creativity is most often defined as the ability to create new or change the existing form, which means innovation or design. Different authors define creativity in different ways, so Ladislav Bogнар (2012) mentions three theoretical approaches to creativity. The first interprets creativity as a disorder, the second as an inherent human quality, while the third interprets creativity as a socially conditioned characteristic of a person. It is widely accepted that creativity is a characteristic which can be developed by certain methods, especially through lessons and teaching.

It is generally considered that school inhibits creativity since the organization of educational process and creative work can hardly go hand in hand because of the class – subject – lesson system and the principle of “only one correct answer”. Moreover, the frontal teaching method prevails in institutions of higher education giving a bad example to students, especially those who themselves are one day to work in educational institutions (Bognar & Kragulj, 2010). However, lately there has been a shift in the positive direction since younger generations of teachers, following modern paradigms (more often than before), turn to alternative ways of teaching such as in, for example, Waldorf or Montessori schools. In order to stimulate creative lessons, a

humanistic approach to teaching should be taken since such teaching tends to develop the human potential and not suppress it.

If we wish to achieve this goal, it is necessary to enrich the lessons with various learning methods stimulating divergent thinking and activity of pupils, such as mind maps, brainstorming, dramatizations, storytelling, handiwork, games and similar. Artistic subjects, such as Visual and Musical Arts, also stimulate creativity. It might be the reason why pupils rank these subjects among their favourite ones. This manner of work creates a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom and opens the pupil – pupil, teacher – pupil and teacher – pupils communication.

Such a creative manner of teaching sometimes causes resistance. Those who resist it are usually parents, and not pupils, since parents consider that this is not proper learning because the pupils do not learn bare facts by heart and the teacher does not manage the classroom according to the order-work-discipline principle. It is a result of the traditional approach to school in which they have been taught in their own childhood.

Creative teaching increases pupils' motivation, thrills the pupils and often gives results above our expectations. It helps an individual's personal growth and development which leads to the development of scientific branches and consequently, to the development in general and survival of the society.

When teaching in a creative manner, the teacher puts the pupil in the centre of the educational process and chooses the methods and forms of work tailored for this very pupil. "Studying creativity is today dominantly in the service of education where the school as an institution of systematic development is considered as one of the basic predispositions for the development of creativity from the creative potential of the individual" (Simel & Gazibara, 2012, p. 189). Modern teaching is enriched by various games, actions and methods facilitating the learning techniques, motivating the pupils and developing the creativity and imagination in solving everyday problems and designing new products (Bognar, 2012). Creativity itself strongly increases the quality of lessons and makes them much more efficient than the usual lessons which are boring and must be based on fear and all sorts of pressure in order to take place at all (Bognar, 2012, p. 19).

Through various entertaining activities which stimulate written and oral expression, creative teaching of literacy shows excellent results in the development of language competences since it helps pupils acquire grammar and orthography which often "give them trouble" during schooling (Aladrović Slovaček, Srzentić, & Ivanković, 2014). Creatively developed lessons enable the pupils' free expression and demonstrate their competence in a relaxed atmosphere which resembles natural children's activities and makes a predisposition for successful educational outcomes.

### ***About Game as a Creative Manner of Teaching***

"Game is one of the first ways of learning which enables new knowledge through experience" (Đurić, 2009). Game is definitely one of the main prerequisites for initial

acquisition of knowledge since it is accompanied by sensations of pleasantness and satisfaction, feelings that children experienced in their childhood. It is a well-known fact that children are greatly interested in games from their early childhood, while the kind of game and the number of players vary depending on their psychological and physical development. The positive experience of the game can increase if a child has always been successful in playing the game. By playing children develop their social and cognitive skills since it is a natural way of learning and their natural environment. For this reason, it has to occupy an important place in the classroom as that is where children spend many hours once they enter school.

Just as there is free play, when the children determine the rules and how to play on their own, there are also structured forms of games used in lessons and intended for learning and teaching. Games are most common at the kindergarten and pre-school age. In this period the emphasis is still on entertainment and socialization, but it changes when the child enters school since the game becomes the medium for the acquisition of new knowledge. Research (Nikčević-Milković, Rukavina, & Galić, 2010) shows that seven-year-olds are able to focus their attention for only about 20 minutes, while one lesson lasts for 45 minutes and therefore several activities need to be introduced into the lesson which are going to enable the pupils first to relax and then better focus on the educational contents. While playing, children develop different developmental aspects: cognitive, speech, social, emotional and psychomotor. The development of these aspects is possible as games require pupils to solve problems, think critically, be creative, speak, show self-respect and self-control, motivation and prosocial behaviour. Games stimulate better motivation and activity, improve attention and concentration, decrease exhaustion and moreover, integrate pupils with various problems into classroom activities.

Research on the use and efficiency of games in junior grades of primary school (Nikčević-Milković et al., 2010) showed the actual frequency and the manner of the use of games in our schools. Teachers pointed out that the most useful games are associations, word games, rebuses, crosswords and mathematical games, usually played at the beginning or the end of the lesson. The pupils prefer games of associations and competitive games. These kinds of games keep the pupils constantly interested, attentive and willing to help their group as individuals, making them unconsciously think in a critical manner and find solutions. Further research (Aladrović Slovaček, Srzentić, & Ivanković, 2014) showed that 80% of teachers regularly use games in their lessons, mostly games for stimulation of language skills of reading and writing. Language games are most often used to teach language expression and then orthography, being played to increase motivation or revise educational contents. The research (Nikčević-Milković et al., 2010) showed that teachers with fewer years of working experience use a variety of games and more games than teachers with longer teaching experience. The reason can be in preparation time for each lesson. Younger teachers are better motivated and more willing to implement this kind of teaching and therefore often make in-depth preparations.

Each game used for teaching has to be clearly structured and have a goal to be achieved. Moreover, each game has to be specially adapted to the age and abilities of the pupils and the appropriate manner of playing has to be determined. Though at the first glance it may seem like a simple task, preparing a game to be used for teaching takes a lot of thinking and reflection in order to achieve the main goal and purpose. If not prepared well, some pupils might start experiencing games as something bad and if this happens, the initial goal of the game is lost.

Language games are defined as a space where adults and children are set free in their own language, enjoy themselves while intuitively acquiring the rules and the ability to act according to the rules or to break them (Peti-Stantić & Velički, 2009). Games (according to Aladrović Slovaček, 2011) are usually divided into three kinds: functional (acquiring a particular content), symbolical (teaching future roles – e.g. girls play with dolls and so get prepared for their future roles of mothers) and games with rules (social games, e.g. Ludo). Combining these three kinds of games one can develop different kinds of language games which can be useful for teaching, revising, practising or simply motivating pupils. While playing, children learn and this creates a positive classroom atmosphere, relaxed and free, and therefore pupils do not see such learning as any trouble (Aladrović Slovaček, Ceković, & Zovkić, 2014).

## **Goals and Hypotheses of the Research**

The basic goal of this research is to investigate the influence of language games in Croatian language lessons as a creative manner of teaching literacy development.

In accordance with the basic goal, the following objectives were set:

1. To investigate how often pupils play games in Croatian language lessons and if they like game as a teaching method.
2. To investigate the attitude of pupils towards Croatian language as a school subject, towards school in general and towards particular content of Croatian language teaching.
3. To investigate age and gender differences in pupils' attitudes.
4. To investigate if the integration of language games into Croatian language lessons caused any change in pupils' attitudes.

According to the basic goal and research objectives, the following hypotheses were set:

- H1 – Pupils are expected to play games in Croatian language lessons, but only sometimes, though they like learning through games very much since playing is a child's inherent activity.
- H2 – On average, pupils are expected to like Croatian language as a school subject, but not to like school. They are also expected to prefer the contents of media culture and literature to the contents of language and language expression since media and literature are accessible to them.

- H3 – Girls are expected to like Croatian language as a school subject more than boys, especially writing essays and reading literature. Younger pupils are expected to like the integration of games into lessons more than older pupils.
- H4 – Pupils are expected to show a more positive attitude towards Croatian language as a school subject after lessons with integrated language games.

## Research

### *Sample Description*

The research was conducted among third and fourth grade pupils (N=226) in three primary schools in the city of Zagreb (Bukovac Primary School, Kralja Tomislava Primary School and Rapska Primary School). The final grades of the first educational period (1st – 4th grade of primary school, according to the National Curriculum, 2011) were selected since games should be most represented as a manner of teaching in these grades. The participants were divided by gender (47.8% boys and 48.7% girls, 3.5% did not state their gender) and according to the final marks for the subject Croatian language (58% pupils were marked excellent, 20.4% very good, and 0.9% good) in order to investigate whether there is any difference depending on the gender and the success of the pupils. In addition, the pupils were divided into the control (48%) and experimental group (52%). One Croatian language lesson with integrated language games was held in the experimental group, while this lesson was not held in the control group, the pupils only filled the *Questionnaire for pupils (before the Croatian language lesson)* on the use of language games in lessons and attitude towards language games. The division of pupils into the control and experimental group served as an independent variable for investigating the difference in the attitude towards Croatian language as a school subject.

### *Research Instrument*

The sample of pupils was divided into two groups: the experimental and control group. The control group consisted of 48% of pupils (N=109), and the experimental group of 52% of pupils (N=117). There were 80 pupils of the third grade and 29 pupils of the fourth grade in the control group and 78 pupils of the third grade and 39 pupils of the fourth grade in the experimental group. The control group was made up of 53 girls and 53 boys, while the experimental group had 55 boys and 57 girls there was one good pupil in each group, there were 23 very good pupils in each group. The analysis of pupils' academic achievement showed that there were 61 excellent pupils in the control group and 65 excellent pupils in the experimental group. One Croatian language lesson with integrated language games was held in the experimental group. In agreement with the teachers, the lesson incorporated revision of orthography (*ije/je, č/ć* and capital and small letter), grammar (adjectives, nouns, verbs) and the activities including literary templates (obligatory reading), all in accordance with the Teaching plan (2006). For the purpose of this research, two questionnaires for



pupils were developed: *Questionnaire for pupils before the Croatian language lesson* and *Questionnaire for pupils after the Croatian language lesson*. Each questionnaire contained ten questions - open-ended and closed type - which asked the pupils about their attitude towards games and playing games in Croatian language lessons (the questionnaire before) and the attitude towards the lesson they participated in and the games played during that lesson (the questionnaire after). *The Questionnaire for pupils* primarily includes pupils' biodata – gender, age, place of research and the final mark for the subject Croatian language at the end of the previous school year. The mentioned characteristics served as independent variables in this research. They were followed by several questions about the attitude towards Croatian language as a school subject – on the scale from 1 to 5 pupils were asked to estimate how much they like Croatian language as a school subject and explain their choice. After that, they had to rank three favourite and three least favourite school subjects. In the second part of the questionnaire the pupils were asked to estimate the frequency of playing games in Croatian language lessons as *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely* or *never*. They also had to answer if they liked playing games during lessons and they had to describe one or two games which they played most often. Finally, on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, they had to estimate how much they liked reading, writing reports on obligatory reading, listening to stories, telling stories and watching films during Croatian language lessons. The last was an open-ended question where pupils were asked to write what they would change about school in general in order to make it a pleasant place to learn. Several questions were added to *the Questionnaire for pupils after the Croatian language lesson* about the games incorporated in the Croatian language lesson for the experimental group and the pupils had to estimate each game on a 1-5 Likert scale, select the favourite game and explain their answers. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used for testing distribution normality. The results showed an irregular distribution and therefore non-parametric statistical tests were used in the further procedure.

## Results

The first goal of the research was to investigate how often the pupils play games in Croatian language lessons and if they like game as a teaching method. According to the results, 45% of participants said that they *sometimes* play in Croatian language lessons, 33% *very rarely*, 12% *never*, and only 10% *often* (Chart 1). On the other hand, 72% of the participants say that they *like* playing in Croatian language lessons, 23% say they *neither like nor dislike* playing in Croatian language lessons, and 5% *do not like* playing in Croatian language lessons. The pupils said they mostly play various *quizzes*, *association games*, *word games*, *role reading*, *hangman*, *night and day*, *guessing games* and *knowledge competitions*. Most participants from the experimental group liked or liked very much the games they played during the experimental Croatian language lesson. They most liked competitive games or games that encouraged competitive spirit among the groups in their class. The mentioned results confirm the first hypothesis which assumes that pupils play games in Croatian language lessons, but



only sometimes, though most participants like learning through games since playing is their inherent activity which helps them learn faster, with less fatigue and the time passes quicker when playing.

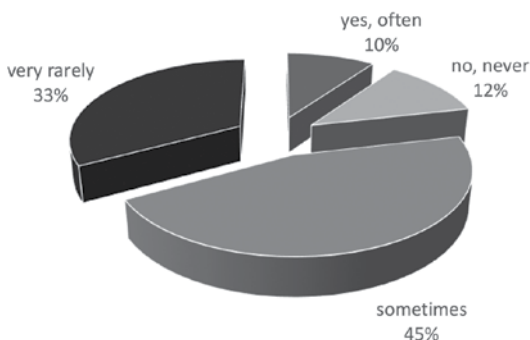


Chart 1. Participants' attitudes towards the frequency of playing games in Croatian language lessons  
(How often do you play games in Croatian language lessons?)

The second goal of the research was to investigate pupils' attitudes towards Croatian language as a school subject, towards school in general and towards particular contents of Croatian language lessons. The results showed that most pupils *like* (32.7%) or *like very much* (51.3%) Croatian language as a school subject. Compared to previous research (Miljević-Riđički et al., 2000, Pavličević-Franić & Aladrović Slovaček, 2011), these results are much better since only about 10% of subjects *do not like* or *do not like at all* Croatian language as a school subject. However, the attitude towards school is not really optimistic. Of the participants in this sample, 47.8% *do not like school at all*, 13.3% *do not like school*, while the rest of them *neither like nor dislike* school (Chart 2). Not a single participant answered that they *like* or *like very much* school. These results are "devastating" and give us reason to worry because the attitude towards school and towards the school subject has a large influence on pupils' success and their social and emotional development. As for Croatian language lessons, pupils like reading, telling stories, acting, drawing, learning new words, but they do not like orthography, too

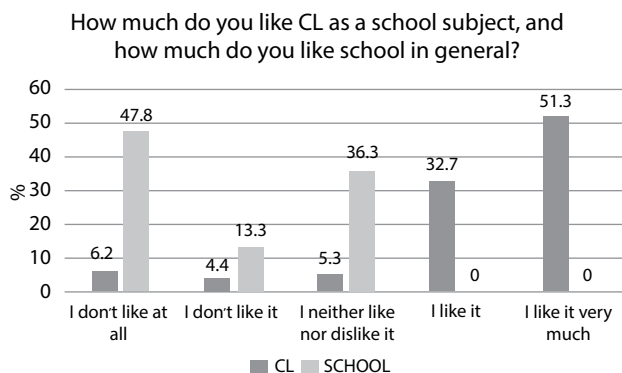


Chart 2. Participants' attitudes towards Croatian language (CL) and school

much obligatory reading and homework. Pupils would like to change many things at school. For example, they would like to make educational contents more interesting, have less homework, play more often during lessons, generally write less, have a better-decorated school and better equipment in classrooms, teachers should be more engaged and pupils should have more freedom in moving around and learning.

The favourite subject of junior grade pupils is P.E. (33%), then Maths (26%), and after that Croatian language (22%). It is interesting that Croatian language is also at the third place of least favourite subjects (14%), while the first place goes to Maths (22%), and the second place to Social Studies (18%).

Concerning Croatian language lessons, the favourite activity is playing games, followed by media culture (watching films). Pupils also like language expression lessons, especially listening, but also reading stories. The least favourite activity is written language expression (writing essays) and reading obligatory literature (Chart 3).

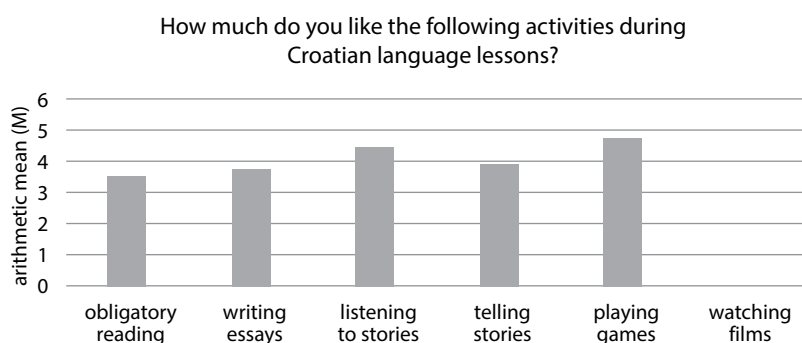


Chart 3. Participants' attitudes towards implementation of language activities and language skills during Croatian language lessons

The results confirm the second hypothesis assuming that the pupils generally like Croatian language as a school subject, though they do not like school. When learning Croatian language as a school subject, they prefer media culture and literature to orthography and grammar.

The third goal of the research was to investigate if age and gender influence pupils' attitudes regardless of being in the control or in the experimental group (N=226). The Mann Whitney U test showed that there is a statistically significant difference (MW=3982;  $z=-3.38$ ;  $MR_3=122.30$ ;  $MR_4=93.06$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) between the results of the third and the fourth grade pupils considering their attitude towards Croatian language as a school subject, the attitude towards playing games during lessons (MW=4134;  $z=-2.84$ ;  $MR_3=103.06$ ;  $MR_4=123.71$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), the listening activities (MW=3768;  $z=-3.48$ ;  $MR_3=115.69$ ;  $MR_4=89.91$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and telling stories (MW=3354;  $z=-3.36$ ;  $MR_3=112.54$ ;  $MR_4=84.32$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Pupils in the third grade show more positive attitude not only towards Croatian language as a school subject but also towards the activities of listening and telling stories, while fourth grade pupils show a significantly more positive attitude towards the frequency of playing games during lessons (Table 1).

Table 1

*Presentation of statistically significant differences according to age (grade)*

Results of Mann-Whitney U test	Medium ranges	
	3rd grade	4th grade
How much do you like Croatian language as a school subject?	122.30	93.06
How often do you play games in Croatian language lessons?	103.06	123.71
On a 1 – 5 scale, how much do you like listening to stories?	115.69	89.91
On a 1 – 5 scale, how much do you like telling stories?	112.54	84.32

The Mann-Whitney Test also shows that there is a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in the results regarding the attitude towards Croatian language ( $MW=4208$ ;  $z=-4.11$ ;  $MR_b=93.46$ ;  $MR_g=125.25$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), attitude towards the frequency of playing games during lessons ( $MW=4364$ ;  $z=-3.33$ ;  $MR_b=116.72$ ;  $MR_g=94.91$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), obligatory reading ( $MW=4062$ ;  $z=-3.00$ ;  $MR_b=91.82$ ;  $MR_g=115.88$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), writing essays ( $MW=3284$ ;  $z=-5.02$ ;  $MR_b=84.48$ ;  $MR_g=123.46$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and listening to stories ( $MW=4306$ ;  $z=-2.85$ ;  $MR_b=94.12$ ;  $MR_g=113.44$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). For all of the variables girls had a more positive attitude than boys, except for the variable “do you like playing games during lessons”, where boys had a more positive attitude and more often answered “yes” (Table 2).

Table 2

*Presentation of statistically significant differences according to gender*

Results of Mann-Whitney U test	Medium ranges	
	m	f
How much do you like Croatian language as a school subject?	93.46	125.25
How often do you play games in Croatian language lessons?	116.72	94.91
On a 1 – 5 scale, how much do you like obligatory reading?	91.82	115.88
On a 1 – 5 scale, how much do you like writing essays?	84.48	123.46
On a 1 – 5 scale, how much do you like listening to stories?	94.12	113.44

The third hypothesis, which assumes that girls like Croatian language as a school subject more than boys, especially writing essays and reading obligatory literature, was confirmed, while the second part of the third hypothesis was not confirmed since fourth grade pupils like playing games during lessons more than younger pupils. This only confirms the fact that third and fourth grade pupils are still in the phase of concrete operations and playing games is their inherent activity (Pavličević-Franić, 2005).

The fourth goal of the research was to investigate if one Croatian language lesson with integrated language games would change pupils' attitudes. The pupils were divided into two groups: the control and experimental groups, and the testing was done based on this division. Mann Whitney test ( $MW=6179$ ;  $z=-0.44$ ;  $MR_{con}=111.69$ ;  $MR_{exp}=115.18$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) showed that pupils who had the Croatian language lesson with integrated language games (experimental group) had a more positive attitude than pupils who did not have such lesson (control group), but the difference is not statistically significant ( $p>0.01$ ).

This disproved the fourth hypothesis which assumed that pupils would show more positive attitudes towards Croatian language as a school subject after the lesson with integrated language games.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Playing games, as an activity which is inherent to children, is one of many creative ways of teaching literacy. This is why it has been chosen for this experiment as a medium through which contents of Croatian language will be presented to pupils. As assumed, pupils in junior grades of primary school like playing and gladly play during Croatian language lessons, though teachers do not often integrate games into their lessons. Pupils are aware of the fact that when playing games they learn faster and more easily, they are more motivated and learning does not make them tired. As for Croatian language, pupils generally have positive attitude. However, their attitude towards school is negative, which warns us that our school system needs to be changed as soon as possible. The changes are also necessary within Croatian language as a school subject since grammar, orthography and obligatory reading are not pupils' favourite activities, and they often describe them as "boring", "tiring" and similar. The results of the experiment showed that implementation of language games positively influenced not only the classroom atmosphere, but also pupils' attitudes, and therefore it is assumed that more games in the classroom would positively influence the process of acquiring functional literacy. The fact is that nowadays, literacy is a frequently discussed topic. However, the methods of creatively teaching literacy are rarely discussed, though this is a very complex area and extremely demanding for pupils. In order to change this, elements of creative teaching methods should be integrated into the teaching process, since they are a necessary precondition for successful lessons. Creative teaching with the purpose of achieving functional literacy should be encouraged in Croatian language lessons not only in junior grades of primary school, but throughout primary and secondary school, and even at university. It is especially important to encourage and develop playing games with students who are to become future Croatian language teachers.

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# Utjecaj jezičnih igara na funkcionalnu pismenost djece mlađe školske dobi

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## Sažetak

Temeljni je cilj nastave Hrvatskoga jezika u osnovnoj školi razvoj jezično-komunikacijske kompetencije, odnosno razvoj funkcionalne pismenosti (NPiP, 2006). Upravo bi zato nastava Hrvatskoga jezika trebala na zanimljiv i kreativan način poticati razvoj pismenosti. Kreativnost je temeljni ljudski potencijal koji se sustavnim poticanjem kreativnoga mišljenja u svim dijelovima obrazovnoga procesa i u svakoj razvojnoj dobi može unaprijediti. Da bi se kreativnost u nastavi jezika ostvarila, potrebno ju je poticati koristeći se zanimljivim načinima i izvorima poučavanja, ali i činiti to na nekonvencionalan i originalan način koji će od učenika zahtijevati otvorenost, radoznalost i kritičko promišljanje. Upravo je zato cilj ovoga rada bio ispitati utjecaj provedbe jezičnih igara u nastavi Hrvatskoga jezika, kao kreativnoga oblika poučavanja, na razvoj pismenosti. U istraživanju su sudjelovali učenici trećega i četvrtoga razreda (N=140) koji su bili podijeljeni na kontrolnu i eksperimentalnu skupinu. Eksperimentalnoj skupini prezentiran je jedan nastavni sat u kojemu su se provele tri jezične igre s ciljem kreativnoga poticanja pismenosti. Rezultati obiju skupina ispitanika uspoređeni su, kao i stavovi prema Hrvatskome jeziku i školi općenito. Pokazalo se da ispitanici vole Hrvatski jezik, ali ne vole školu, da u nastavi Hrvatskoga jezika igre provode tek ponekad, ali se zato svi u nastavi vole igrati jer im je tako nastava zanimljivija. Pokazalo se da djevojčice i učenici trećeg razreda imaju pozitivnije stavove prema sadržajima Hrvatskoga jezika od dječaka i učenika četvrtog razreda. Pokazalo se jednako tako da učenici iz eksperimentalne skupine imaju pozitivniji stav prema Hrvatskome jeziku kao nastavnome predmetu i da pokazuju bolje rezultate u znanju. Bolji rezultati eksperimentalne skupine pokazuju da se u nastavi Hrvatskoga jezika važno što više i što češće koristiti jezičnim igrama kao jednim od kreativnih načina poučavanja pismenosti.

**Ključne riječi:** funkcionalna pismenost; jezične igre; kreativno mišljenje; rano učenje hrvatskoga jezika.